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WASHINGTON - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom met in private session with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Friday, May 11, to discuss the Commission's grave concern over the alarming and deteriorating situation for freedom of religion and belief in Iraq, a country the Commission designated for its Watch List earlier this month.

Although non-state actors, particularly the Sunni-dominated insurgency, are responsible for a substantial proportion of the sectarian violence and associated human rights violations, the Iraqi government also bears responsibility.

The Commission also expressed concern over the plight of non-Muslims in Iraq, including ChaldoAssyrian Christians, Yazidis, and Sabeen Mandaean, whose communities now face the threat of eradication from their ancient homelands in Iraq under pervasive and severe violence and discrimination at the hands of both government and non-government actors.

In addition to Iraq, the Commissioners raised religious freedom and associated human rights issues in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, China, Bangladesh, Turkey and the 56-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Earlier this month, the Commission recommended in a letter to Secretary Rice that the State Department designate Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and China, among others, as Countries of

Particular Concern, whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of religious freedom. It announced that Bangladesh was again on its Watch List of countries meriting close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by their governments.

Religious freedom conditions and associated human rights issues in these countries are analyzed in detail in the Commission's 2007 Annual Report, which was released on May 2. The Annual Report and the letter to Secretary Rice are available online at [www.uscifr.gov](http://www.uscifr.gov).

Commission Vice Chairs Elizabeth Prodromou, Nina Shea and Michael Cromartie and Commissioners Richard D. Land and Preeta D. Bansal attended the 45-minute meeting with Secretary Rice.

**The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Felice D. Gaer